

Essay on
Reason & Instinct
by

Thorndon

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1. Reason & Instinct
2. Unity of power & disease
3. Preservation principle -
4. Nature - Causes &c - of Sleep.
5. On the Will -
6. Sensation & Motion
7. Vis Medicatrix Naturae -
8. Vital principle.

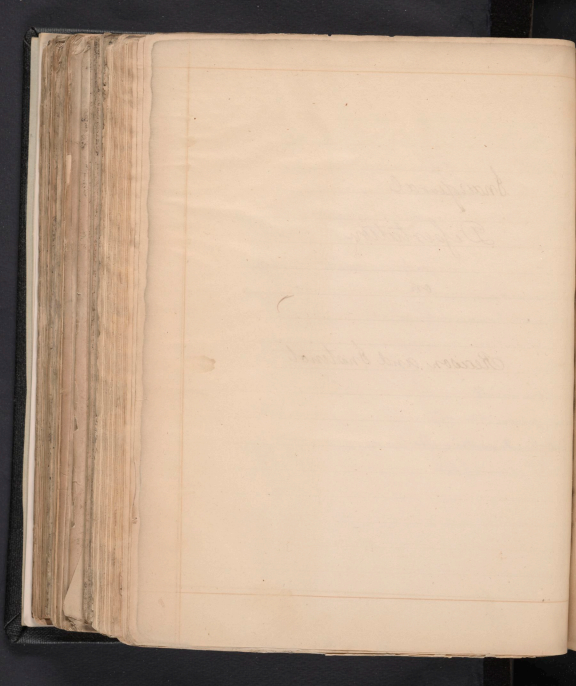
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My. laticinctus Holmgr.

Inaugural
Dissertation

on

Reason and Instinct



Genl.ⁿ In an attempt to compose an inaugural dissertation, it might seem, that a desire to avoid the suspicion of arrogance or presumption, would demand an apology for its numerous imperfections. The duties which are exacted from a student during his attendance on a course of Lectures are so numerous & laborious, as almost totally to preclude a possibility of complying, either with the established rules of rhetoric, with grammatical propriety, or that explicit elucidation, which the importance of the subject may demand; and, at the expense of other duties of perhaps more real importance. I shall therefore conclude these observations by quoting a remark of the justly celebrated Helander, in which he says "We should first learn, then practice, & afterwards write." The subject of the following essay is that of reason & instinct, and among the many opinions which have been advanced on it at different periods, none have more generally prevailed than the one which considers reason as peculiar to man, and instinct as appertaining to the lower orders of animals alone. Although this opinion has so generally prevailed, & has even been supported by the learned & amiable Addison in the "Spectator"

tor, that pleasing & delightful source of useful instructions to all its perusers, yet I feel confident in believing that had his acquaintance of natural philosophy, extended to some fact which subsequent discoveries have brought to light: his confidence in the doctrine which he then advocated would have been much shaken or destroyed. At the very commencement of an inquiry, a difficulty presents itself of no small magnitude. It is all important that the individual whose ideas we would wish to learn, should convey to us by the powers of language, his sensations, his desires, his inclinations, his antipathies, his trains of thought &c. from impressions from without. In the human species when there are not as-
sisted by language, the countenance, the mirror of the mind reflects at times, with mirroring certainty the operations which are going on within; while in the inferior animals, though the countenance is to a certain extent, expressive of their feelings, yet we acquire but little information from it; nor, it relates to language, it is well known, we receive none from that source. Our knowledge then of the motives which actuate the brute creation &c. to certain actions,

must necessarily be derived from an attentive observation
of ~~their~~ actions; & when we find them to correspond with
those we are accustomed to perform ourselves, under the in-
fluence of the dictates of reason, we are abundantly sanc-
tioned by the decisions of philosophical fairness, in attribu-
ting them to the same cause. It may be here necessary to de-
fine terms, & the definition of reason given by Charles For-
tugill in his essay on natural history, is the one which will
be adopted; viz: the faculty of distinguishing between good &
evil, of calculating future consequences, & of discerning
the fitness of things. By instinct is meant that innate prin-
ciple which spontaneously & intuitively directs the being, pursuing
it, to the performance of certain actions, independently of any
distinction, calculation or discernment, except so far as it relates
to the impulse of that principle; as the duck & the water snake
attach themselves to the water as soon as they are liberated from
the shell, & the young of several mammalia immediately ap-
plying themselves to the teats of their mother, after birth. These
are all illustrative of the principle we denominate instinct.
A question arises, can the actions we observe animals to perform

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he accounted for on the principle of instinct alone! I answer, that the biographies of animals, are pregnant with facts fully illustrative of the negation of this question. & of action, have been observed, which are inadequately explained on the principle of instinct alone, thus came other principles must be called in to its aid; & I hope to show that this auxiliary is reason. Bolton the ingenious author of the "Harmonia Naturalis" relates the following interesting fact, "on the 10th May 1762 I observed a pair of Goldfinches beginning to make their nest in my garden. They had formed the ground work with moss, grass &c. as usual: but when I scattered parcels of wool in different parts of the garden, they left off their work of this own stuff, & employed the wool; afterwards I gave them cotton, on which they rejected the wool. & proceeded with the cotton, on the 3^d day I supplied them with fine down on which they forsook the cotton & finished their work with the down. Now the conduct of these little beautiful architects, not only evinced a free agency on this point, but also, by the act of determining, showed the capability of operations of reasoning. No person could have

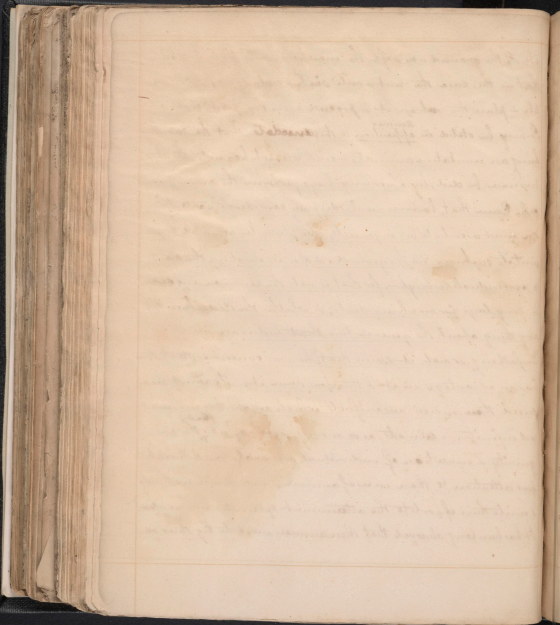
have selected with better judgement, the article has ad-
apted to this purpose. In the Medical Repository of
New York a Mr Simpson has published the following
fact: "During my residence in 'Sage's' at Wiltow, early
one morning I heard a noise from a couple of Martins
that were jumping from tree to tree, adjoining my
dwelling, they made several attempts to get into a box
fixed against the house, which they had before occupied
but they appeared to fly off with the greatest dread,
repeating those loud cries which first drew my atten-
tion. Curiosity led me to watch their motions, after
some time a small Wren came from the box & perched
upon a tree near it, when his shrill notes seemed to
arouse his antagonists. After a short time the Wren flew
away. The Martins took this opportunity of occupy-
ing the cage, but their stay was short. This diminutive
adversary returned & made them fly in the utmost pre-
cipitation. This kind of contest was kept up the whole day
& the Wren kept popping during the night. The following
morning the Wren having left the nest, the Martins were

mediately reentered this mansion, broke up their own
nest of things of several sizes, & setting ~~to~~ work with more
ingenuity than I suppose they possessed, they soon barri-
caded this door. The Men returned, but could not en-
ter. She then attempted to storm the works, but failed. I
would not say that the Martins followed our modern mode
of tactics, by carrying with them a sufficiency of food
to maintain a siege, or that they made use of castanets
which necessity, sometimes, during a long & bad storm might
probably occasion: but they persevered for more than two days to
defend the entrance within the barricade. This persever-
ing she could not force an entry, raised the siege & left
the Martins in quiet possession without further molesta-
tions. In the conduct of these Martins invention & fore-
sight are eminently displayed, & the faculty of judge-
ment & reason clearly manifested. Would not the most in-
telligent persons, placed in the same circumstances, be treated
in the same way? This act could never have been
taught by any education, for it resulted from the pecu-
liarity of the circumstances. I would therefore consider it

as a voluntary act dictated by ^(principle, &c.) ~~unconscious~~ ^{unconscious} intelligence.
Dr. Hestergill in a late work on the philosophy of Nature thus
relates the following fact on the authority of Pantoffidan
besides several instances of the same kind observed by him-
self which confirm his belief of its correctness. A Moni-
gian Fox was seen near a fisherman's hut employed in lay-
ing a considerable number of eels dead in a row, & having
secreted himself behind them, he made a boat of the first
Crab that came to devour them. The following singular &
interesting fact of the mode by which the same animal rid-
s himself of the fleas which at times ~~pierces~~ ^{infest} him, is related
on the same authority. "The takes a bunch of moss or some
in his mouth, & by gradually stepping backward into the
water, the insects retreat from the water & get onto the dry
moss, at which time the Fox lets it fall & runs off, exal-
ting in the success of his stratagem. In a letter from Sir John
Florrington to Oliver Henry, son of James 1st dat^d 6th of October
June 14th 1608. & subsequently published, in the Gentle-
man's Magazine, we have a very interesting account
of a dog, the property of Sir John, that was remarked for his

agacity & ingenuity. Having been sent with two charges of sack wine, the apparatus by which he carried it became deranged, so that he could not proceed. He then took one of the oocytes concealed it under some rushes & submerged the other in his mouth; returned & conveyed the one he had concealed. This fact Sir John says, was observed by a number of labourers working in the vicinity of the ovens. Mr. Dugald Stewart in his 1 vol. of his Philosophy of the human mind, mentions the following interesting anecdote, which is related by Mr. Baile in his letter on animals, addressed to Mr. L. Kay. One of his friends, a man of intelligence & society, had a very intelligent monkey, to which he gave nuts as an amusement. Having placed them out of the reach of the monkey, the animal after having made several fruitless attempts to get them, observing a servant puffing with a pipe in his under his arm, which he snatched and was thereby enabled to procure the nuts. This animal also displayed great ingenuity in his mode of reaching them, which he effected in the following manner. Having placed them on the ground he let fall on it from a height a stone sufficiently heavy to break

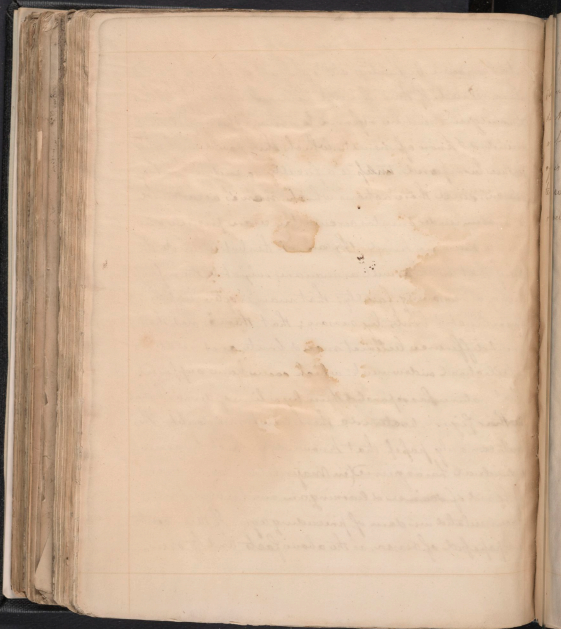
it. If the ground was soft, the monkey would, (having seen
that in this case the nut would sink & not break) obtain a
tile & place the nut on it & proceed as in the first instance.
It may be stated in ^{answer} opposition to this anecdote, that the monkey
being an imitative animal, wished to crack his nuts in the
manner he did, by observing boys perform the same pro-
cess; Even that, however would display considerable attention,
we must ascribe to his ingenuity the plan he adapted to pre-
vent it, sinking in the ground, & also in elevating the stone
to a considerable height, for that is not the common mode even
among boys for cracking nuts, & whether the monkey has
any thing about the general law, that bodies acquire force
in falling, or not, it seems that he was conscious, that there
was an advantage in it & therefore done it. Having pro-
duced these miscellaneous facts which might be increased
ad infinitum almost, as so many proofs of ^(last) the in-
genuity & invention of individual animals, let us direct
our attention to those cases of animals, which live in society
& unite their efforts to the attainment of some common end -
It has been long observed that these animals indicate by their co-



tion, a species of mental endowment. Such superior to those
that inhabit forests, & live as it were in solitude & solitude.
- the observation is equally true, whether in relation to large
or small animals; though most forcibly illustrated in the
insect tribes. It is chiefly to the gregarious insects, constituting
as it were little republics, that we are to look for that unity
of design, & combination of efforts, which are seldom surpas-
sed in the social compact of human society. Two tribes, of
insect, however, the one chiefly owing to its great utility
has attracted the attention of mankind, I allude to the
Bees & Ants. They have at all times been regarded with
interest & delight for the wonderful display of ingenuity
- design, which they have witnessed in the structure of their hab-
itations & in the subordination of their societies. The young
Mr. Huber has elegantly detailed to us in the Edinburgh
Review, an account of their habits, modes of transportation,
gravel, degradation, sport, amusements, constituting
a correct miniature of human society with all its virtues
& vices. Considering instinct as a principle intrinsically per-
fect & totally incapable of improvement, it must of neces-

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erty I conceive be inadequate to the explanation of the facts
above related. If then instinct will not account for them
their origin must be referred to some other affection of
mind, & I know of none to which they could with any
justice be referred, unless to a faculty or endowment of
reason, since those actions which man is accustomed
to perform under similar circumstances are precisely sim-
ilar to them in kind. I cannot then but incline to the
belief that brutes as well as man are subject to the influ-
ence of a reasoning faculty; that man is often impelled
by instinct & brutes by reason; that there is not that
great difference between man & brutes, as it relates to
intellectual endowment, which some have supposed.
That nature has separated them by a line of demarcation
in their figure, & exterior &c. there can be no doubt. The
brute can only possess that knowledge which he as an
individual has acquired (in Majoritatem), while man
by the aid of science & learning, can avail himself of the
accumulated wisdom of preceding ages. If then brutes
are possessed of reason, as the above facts tend to show,



if they possess an intellectual power, & intellect be the por-
tion which separating from the clog of mortality by
death is to exist in the endless ages of eternity, will they
not also be immortal? The answer to this important ques-
tion, is that the only true assurance we have of an eternal exis-
tence hereafter is derived from revelation; & we have no
revelation that has promised immortality to brutes.

Finitis

